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UNH Researchers Author One of the First Reports on Crimes by Baby-sitters

By [Erika Mantz](#)
UNH News Bureau
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Editors: David Finkelhor is available for interviews at (603) 862-2761.

DURHAM, N.H. -- Baby-sitters commit twice as many sexual offenses as physical assaults, with teenage baby-sitters responsible for nearly half of the sex crimes, according to a new report authored by researchers at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center.

"Crimes Against Children by Baby-sitters" is the latest in a series published by the U.S. Department of Justice. According to authors David Finkelhor and Richard Ormrod, while baby-sitters do commit serious crimes, the actual risk to children is not high. The estimated 7,000 to 8,000 offenses reported to police each year make up only four percent of the violent crimes committed against all juveniles.

"Kids suffer a lot more crimes at the hands of family members than baby-sitters," Finkelhor says. "On the other hand, although very few baby-sitter crimes result in fatalities, baby-sitter crimes appear to be more likely to result in injuries than other crimes against children."

The report shows that sex crimes by baby-sitters, which make up 65 percent of reports coming to police attention, have a different pattern from physical assaults, which make up the remaining 35 percent. The sex crimes tend to occur more often to three-to five-year-olds at the hands of offenders who are more likely to be males and teenagers. The physical assaults occur most often to one-to three-year-olds and are committed predominantly by adult female baby-sitters.

According to the authors, a possible explanation is that adult baby-sitters may be given responsibility for younger children for longer periods, creating the kind of stress and control conflicts that trigger physical assaults on children. In contrast, sex offenses are often crimes of opportunity that occur during the more occasional exposures that children have with teenage baby-sitters.

"These findings reinforce the importance of screening and training for baby-sitters, and of providing preschool-aged children with simple messages about inappropriate touching," says Finkelhor.

The study was based on crimes reported to police in the National Incidence Based Reporting System, a new detailed crime database that currently compiles information from 17 states. Despite long-standing parental anxiety about the safety of children while in the care of baby-sitters, crime statistics had not previously been available.

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